Los Vaqueros

The cowboy is one of the most famous images in the history of the United States.

When homesteaders and other people came to settle the western part of the United States the tradition of the cowboy was born from the Mexican and Spanish vaqueros.

The word ‘vaquero’ means cowboy. Originally the word ‘vaquero’ came from two words ‘vaca’ meaning ‘cow’ and ‘caballero’ meaning ‘gentlemen’. Vaqueros were men on horseback herding cattle in the Southwest of the present-day United States of America. They were typically single men that would travel to areas where they could find work. These Mexican and Spaniard men were the original cowboys of the United States.

The Wild West, already a part of Mexico, was the birthplace of the American cowboy traditions, such as: the rodeo, cattle herding, expert horse training, and the cowboy code. The vaqueros were considered loyal, brave and honorable men. Hundreds of American songs, movies and media have used the cowboy as a icon for strength and honor, likening cowboys to knights, with their rope and spurs in place of armor and a sword.

The names Wyatt Earp, Jesse James and Wild Bill Hickock are well known cowboys. Another famous vaquero was Joaquin Murieta. We know him as Zorro. Zorro is a legendary vaquero of the late 19th Century. He has been immortalized in hundreds of stories and movies based on his life, and characters inspired by his actions. Most recently the Spanish actor, Antonio Banderas, has played the role of Zorro and also the voice of ‘Puss and Boots,’ a fictional animated character inspired by the cowboy legend.

The cowboy is a uniquely American tradition with strong roots in Hispanic culture and language. The next time you see a cowboy image think about the word vaquero and how it represents a proud tradition of hard work and honor for hundreds of years..

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<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joaquin_Murrieta>

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